

Apprenticeship à la mode? Some Reflections on Learning as Cultural Labour

Phil Cohen

Starting points

It is an encouraging sign of the times that many of the questions raised by what used to be called 'the new vocationalism', and which were sidelined at the time it was introduced, are today finding their way back onto the agenda of academic, if not yet political, debate. During the 1980s when Thatcherism was in full flood, a surprising number of erstwhile radical educationalists were being carried along in the first flush of enthusiasm for the enterprise culture and the promise of what it could do for those who had been failed by an educational system still permeated by anti-industrial values. There was, it seemed, little room for a wider-angled view of what was at stake. In this brave new world, apprenticeship was just another dirty word to put alongside trade unionism, socialism and Marxism, part of the accumulated ideological baggage which was supposedly holding back the innate spirit of free enterprise of the British people, and therefore fully deserving to be junked.

Today, under the sign of 'modernity', apprenticeship is making a comeback bid, as a name for what might constitute a more viable and open-ended form of learning to labour under post-industrial capitalism – an antidote to what has so far been on offer under the rubric of the new vocationalism. *En route* Modern Apprenticeship has been approximated to the middle-class paradigm of career. The 'modern apprentices' are dressed up in business suits, and cheerfully consign their overalls (and the blue-collar culture of manual labourism) to the dustbins of history.

At first sight it is difficult to tell whether this piece of re-description is simply another exercise in political impression management – on a par with calling polytechnics universities as if this somehow disguised the fact that we have a two-tier structure of higher education – or whether it does in fact

correspond to a substantial change in the form and content of training. Is the re-valorization of the term a rather cunning way to deploy a sentimental image of artisan culture to disguise the pervasive deskilling and loss of control over the overall labour process that has resulted from the introduction of new informatics and corporate management strategies? Or are we dealing with a rather disingenuous nominalism, an exercise in wishful thinking – if only we change the name then the reality it denotes will change too? Or does ‘apprenticeship à la mode’ represent a genuine piece of social engineering, indicating the best possible future for a new generation of young workers? How, in any of these cases, are we to disentangle the mythography of apprenticeship from what is practised in its name?

I do not think the question is resolvable by interviewing trainees or by observing what goes on in the schemes to which this term is once more being attached. Valuable and indeed indispensable as do-it-yourself ethnographies of learning are (Heath, 1983), the answer will ultimately depend on what is meant by ‘apprenticeship’ in the first place. The term has been subject to a great deal of conceptual inflation and is surrounded by an aura of imagery which cannot fail to arouse the most diverse expectations. That is why a good place to start the enquiry is to ask just what apprenticeship has meant historically and what it has come to represent today. What kind of story, about work, gender, identity, learning, growing up, the nature of mind and body, does apprenticeship tell?

A short history of apprenticeship: from mimesis to masquerade

In the account I am going to give, apprenticeship is considered not just in its narrow legal/contractual or institutionalized form, but in its wider sense, as what Foucault (1988) has called a ‘technology of self’, or what Bourdieu (1977), more mindful of its social dimensions, has called a ‘habitus’. Each general form of labour and learning has its own special kind of social routine organizing certain, largely unconscious, frames of mind and body into specific dispositions of skill and competence, which in turn are associated with particular kinds of identity work. Although this process is most visible in customary rules and rituals of initiation into workplace cultures, or in the knowledge/power structures of schooling and training, it is no less present in the contexts of family and community life, where sexual and generational divisions of labour are reproduced – and sometimes challenged. Even where they are not locally dominant, the social relations of apprenticeship have often furnished a referential model for these other, more informal kinds of learning activity; as a cognitive frame or code, apprenticeship becomes embedded in the making and telling of life stories within communities of practice centred around hobbies, sport and all manner of physical and social recreation (Bertaux and Thompson, 1993; Rogoff 1990).

Yet we cannot understand the vicissitudes of apprenticeship in this wider sense outside its changing articulation to other equally deep-rooted codes, in particular those of inheritance, vocation and career. Each of these codes constitutes a distinctive culture of informal learning, relaying a particular set of relations between cultural capital and cultural labour; each code also has its own autobiographical register, throwing a diachronic grid over the key experiences of identity formation as well as synchronically regulating access to subject positions *vis-à-vis* knowledge and power (Cohen, 1997).

For example, the apprenticeship code unfolds life as a step-by-step struggle for mastery over a given body of knowledge or skill. The inheritance code forges a set of quasi-congenital links between origins and destiny, making each child a chip off the parental block – you have your mother’s hands, your father’s sense of humour. Vocation privileges the life journey as an endless quest for the discovery or fulfilment of an authentic inner self; career sets the infant’s feet competitively upon the first rungs of a symbolic ladder of incremental achievement even before it has learnt to walk.

In understanding how these codes operate singly or in combination, it is important to make a distinction between two orders of representation within and across which their paradigms operate: mimesis and masquerade. Although in the so-called post-modern turn they are often fused or confused, it is important to distinguish them in principle, because they hold very different implications for how we understand the learning processes entailed (Bakhtin, 1994; Lotman, 1990).

Mimesis is a practice of simulation and/or emulation which claims to master or comprehend external reality through a model or instrument which reproduces its essential features in a scaled-down, and hence manipulable version. Children’s toys, automata, puppets, maps, diagrams, scale drawings, role models, realist art and literature and natural scientific explanations all function in this mode. Fitness is here a matter of likeness, a sense of appropriate correspondence or analogy between map and territory, labour and product, or more generally between what is fashioned and the material from and about which the process of production draws its meaning. Mimesis for most of its history has been an art of direct mirror control exercised over bodies, techniques, environments and materials, and a very masculine art it has been at that.

Masquerade in contrast is a practice of dissemblance or dissimulation, which aims to overcome a perceived lack or absence in the real (eg, the separation of the worker from the means of labour) through a model of indirect mastery inscribed in the process of representation itself. Here the traditionally ‘feminine’ arts of disguise and impression management hold sway and fitness is a matter of liking (not likeness), a sense of what might be pleasurable related to what, within the chosen symbolic frame. Masquerade enables people to play with difference, to adopt the role of the other, in order to stage-manage their identity in ways which reduce anxiety of influence, and maintain positions of symbolic control in situations where in real

economic and political terms they are powerless. The model that figures in masquerade fashions nothing but the desires which it clothes with its own rhetorical devices.

As Benjamin points out (1989), children's play is dominated by the mimetic faculty, but its realm is in no way limited by what one person can imitate in another. The child plays at being not only a shopkeeper or a nurse, but also a windmill, a train or a space capsule. The mimetic faculty, he insists, has a history – one that is bound up with the history of social production, and leads ultimately to its supersession by masquerade.

It is certainly the case that until the advent of industrial capitalism, the vast majority of people in Western societies learnt to labour through mimetic forms of apprenticeship. In the phase of manufacture, or small workshop production, the implements of labour were often thought of as a kind of prosthetic extension of bodily skill, moulded by the customary usages of handicraft (Jennings, 1985). Co-ordinated actions of hand, ear and eye were initially privileged over other parts or techniques of the body as the medium of apprenticeship; for the early labour aristocracy, skill was a function of this specialized dexterity, embodied in a form of cultural capital transmitted from generation to generation – a patrimony of skill that was in your blood and bones. Growing up to be skilled always entailed an apprenticeship to this kind of inheritance (Bisseret, 1981; More, 1980).

Those who laboured primarily with their shoulders, backs, thighs, genitals or feet were, in contrast, treated as an inferior, 'species-specific' type of unskilled worker, almost a 'race apart'. This distinction, which took on moral as well as economic overtones in the Victorian period, was found in many trades and industries. There is the contrast between stevedores and dockers, actresses and prostitutes, the hewers and lumpers of coal. Within the 'race apart', the musculatures of labour were largely trans-valued through their masculinization; only as a vehicle for the assertion of virile forms of strength and endurance (ie, 'hardness') could these otherwise abject forms of labour be invested with a sense of pride in physical prowess (Rule, 1980). In both skilled and unskilled forms, learning to labour thus involved apprenticeship to an inheritance governed by strictly patriarchal rules. The apprenticeships that existed within women's trades tended to be attenuated versions of the masculine forms. As for the 'domestic' apprenticeships served by budding housewives and mothers, here the sexual division of labour assumed its most 'naturalized' and emotionally loaded form (Pollert, 1981; Scott and Tilly, 1978).

As long as rhythms of labour were tightly calibrated to cycles of seasonal production, the functions of nature and the immediate body were bound mimetically to the second nature of the social order and its feudal/patriarchal body politic. Only through masquerade, associated with practices of youth misrule and riotous apprenticeship, was it possible to temporarily suspend or up-end these fixed social hierarchies (Mitterauer, 1992). Many of the early forms of resistance to capitalist work discipline drew upon and

extended these practices. In fact, with the advent of machinofacture, learning to labour continued to be an apprenticeship to an inheritance, but the terms and functions of that articulation changed. At first, the new technologies of mass production were regarded as simply bigger and better hand tools. Mechanized functions were 'naturalized' and compared to those of the body, especially in its sexual or reproductive capacities. It is no coincidence that factory workers were called 'hands', but already here the relation is less one of 'natural symbolism' than a calculated metonymy, which will quickly enough become transformed into metaphor (Rabinbach, 1990).

With the advent of fully-fledged Fordism and the accelerated trade cycle, the customary rhythms of employment in the manual trades became increasingly at odds with the tempo of mass production. Handicraft processes were marginalized and increasingly replaced by semi-skilled repetitive work. As this occurred, artisan techniques become increasingly aestheticized and/or feminized, and given a new lease of life under the sign of vocation. Morris, Ruskin and the arts and crafts movement attempt to create a vision of socialism around a return to this idealized pre-industrial body of manual labour, now reconfigured as a mimetic medium of creative self-expression (Joyce, 1991).

Meanwhile in the real world of mass production and consumption, once the commodity becomes 'second nature', mimesis becomes a direct instrument of self-alienation. As living labour becomes increasingly disembodied or, as Marx put it, dominated by dead labour, so the structures of imitation/emulation which governed the apprenticeships of the 'old' labouring body become both a site for the hyper-exploitation of youth labour, and a brake on the introduction of fully rationalized regimes of social production (Sohn-Rethel, 1978). Patriarchal closures around an imagined community of labour power intensify in popular cultures of resistance to dilution and deskilling; but they also trigger new reactive forms of youth misrule and masquerade which subvert the attempts of 'civilizing missionaries' to conform working-class life and labour to the moral economy of industrial work discipline.

It is no coincidence in fact that historically non-indentured boy labour has been concentrated not in manufacturing but in the distribution and servicing trades. If they have been confined to the lowest paid, least skilled positions within these sectors, this has nothing to do with any real qualities or lack of them which young workers may possess. It has everything to do with customary practice in confining lads to the fetching and carrying of goods, the servicing of clients or customers, or lending a helping hand to the adult worker. Sometimes all three menial tasks were combined in the same job, sometimes there was a progression from one to the other, but the essential point is that boy labour was proto-domestic labour: it was modelled on women's work in the home. This was underscored by the social relations of the workplace. The new lad was expected to make the tea, run errands, sweep up and generally serve as a skivvy to the older men, whether he was

officially 'mated' to them or not. He was also subjected to a good deal of teasing, often of a sexual kind, designed to show him up as soft or incompetent in various ways. All this was part of the initiation of the 'virgin' worker, something that had to be endured in order to eventually make the grade as a fully-fledged 'workmate'. Normally this would involve the apprentice demonstrating that he was just as 'hard' as the older men were and, by extension, emulating their supposed sexual prowess with women.

Sexual apprenticeships in fact complemented the occupational form. In some trades the sexual initiation of the young worker was undertaken by an older woman at work, egged on by her workmates. Usually the women chosen for this task were unmarried and regarded as especially unattractive; certainly the initiation rites contained a sadistic, castratory element. In the second stage, however, the sexual apprentice gets his own back in exercising his new-found mastery of technique over younger, preferably virgin girls (and/or through rituals that feminize younger weaker boys). Finally, the sexual improver finds a 'steady' and graduates to the phase of courtship, essentially a form of apprenticeship to marriage and the role of the family wage earner. This tripartite system is summarized in Table 9.1.

Table 9.1 Traditional masculine code of apprenticeship:
from the youth wage to the family wage

<i>Gender identity narrative</i>	<i>Occupational identity narrative</i>
1. Initiation of virgin boy by older woman	'Feminization' of virgin worker 'mated' to older man
2. Practice of sexual mastery over younger girls	Counter-display of masculine 'hardness' <i>vis-à-vis</i> younger lads
3. Going steady – courtship as apprenticeship to marriage	Making the grade as a workmate among the men

The linkage between techniques of masculinity and manual labour was thus forged through a radical disavowal of the despised quasi-feminine status assigned to male youth by the generational division of labour. The mimetic forms of apprenticeship are split: one way they point to an imposed and 'regressive' identification with women's work (and the world of childhood) and by the other route, they constitute a no less imposed but 'progressive' identification with men's work (and the world of adulthood) entered through an active repudiation of everything associated with the 'proto-domestic'. The mimetic split is resolved through a process of more or less ritualized masquerade: an imaginary sexual division is constructed in order to maintain a real generational one, while displacing the terms of an otherwise all too Oedipal confrontation between the old hands and the noviciates whom they are training to one day replace them. It is through the

intervention of this social imagery that the apprentices' position of peripheral participation is legitimated within the real community of practice in the workplace (Lave and Wenger, 1993).

Through the inter-war period these grids of apprenticeship and inheritance largely held, and continued to forge quasi-congenital links between growing up, working and class; this provided stable – and highly unequal – sets of gender, and generational identification; life histories, however personally complicated, could be related through a coherent and readily accessible narrative grammar. The post-war settlement permanently destabilized this culture of manual labourism, with very different consequences for boys and girls. It inaugurated a double-edged programme of modernization; this involved conserving some of the most archaic structures of the nation state, by nationalizing its cultural ideology and giving it a popular/democratic face (Joyce, 1991). At the same time the no less archaic forms of labour's habitus (including male apprenticeship) were to be swept away and replaced by the meritocratic code of career and a new non-possessive form of individualism (Cohen, 1997).

The triumph of the new vocationalism did not however mean that the mimetics of manual labour entirely withered away. Some elements are subsumed as shadowing, or mentoring, under the new training regimes. At the same time the grid of apprenticeship/inheritance takes on a new lease of life outside production as a source of vicarious identification with techniques of mastery over nature and the labour process, in a kind of defiant masquerade that camouflages real absences, losses and lacks. In this way, some of the more hidden injuries of gender and class inflicted by the deskilling/reschooling of labour are neutralized, either by parodying their effect on others, or by projecting an immaculate body image 'hardened' by the rigours of manual labour as a new and entirely narcissistic ego and peer group ideal.

Through this process of re-embodiment, the productive capacities of disciplined labour are symbolically reclaimed, by and for the individual worker, albeit in a displaced form (Hochschild, 1983). In dance, in sport and especially in the more physically punishing kinds of male athleticism, the element of degradation in manual labour is transformed into a perverse principle of self-gratification. Or to put it another way, submission to physical self-discipline becomes the male body's own labour of love. *En route* labour learns to mimic capital in its own onward march of repressive productivity.

The growth of youth unemployment as a structural feature of Western economies throughout the 1980s and 1990s cut off a whole generation from any kind of work apart from what was offered by the hidden economy. The collapse of customary transition routes from school to work accelerated the collapse of the culture of manual labourism; as the codes of apprenticeship and inheritance increasingly pulled apart and become enclosed in their own technologies of self-reference, so the links between growing up,

working and class not only weakened, but became permanently displaced into idioms of gender and race that hitherto had been subsumed within them.

Among those who could not gain entry to the new post-Fordist work habitus, certain types of traditional manual work now took on a hyper-inflationary value, not so much because of the skill or wage level entailed, but because they require or permit the public display of masculinities which have otherwise become redundant. Certain types – the building worker, the trucker, the rigger, the cowboy, the steel erector and the miner – are repackaged for homeboy consumption. In Country and Western music, in buddy movies, in soft porn magazines and comics, in corporate advertising, in TV serials, their praises are sung, often with strongly homoerotic overtones. This new ideal body-of-labour has little to do with the realities of the jobs, and you do not have to learn any trade skills to become one. It has everything to do with masculine masquerade and nothing to do with the mimetic apprenticeships of manual labour. These figures are celebrated for being ruggedly individualistic, *and* for restoring a lost sense of physical male fraternity and pride; and not just to the working classes, but to the nation as a whole. They have indeed been invented as the standard-bearers of a new white race, which is in fact only the old lost white race of colonial frontiersmen in a new guise. For those who rejected these 'ideal types' of manual labour as sites of identification because they no longer correspond to any realizable aspiration, there is little but the narcissism of minor difference offered by popular youth cultures to fall back on. When apprenticeship is only to and from itself youth ceases to be merely a transitional stage and becomes a referential model for the whole life story. Body politics and performative dramas around the mastery of 'feminine' techniques of impression management and masquerade (and their masculinist disavowal) now take centre stage, to produce a scenario of discontinuous moments. This new situation could be represented as shown in Table 9.2.

Table 9.2 Contemporary code of apprenticeship

<i>Axis of self-reference</i>	<i>Axis of 'the other'</i>
1. Initiation with peers	Rivalry with peers:respect
2. Labouring masculinity	Belabouring race:territory
3. Softening style	Hardening bodies:attitude

Local situated knowledge

Having briefly outlined a general history of this shift from mimesis to masquerade within the code of apprenticeship, I would now like to consider how

this might play out within a local context, in terms of the relation between real and imagined communities of practice in the East End of London.

In a series of case studies in ex-Docklands areas we are currently looking at how the cultures of manual labourism have been internally modified in order to sustain strong, and often strongly racialized, practices of class, gender and ethnic identity. In particular we are looking at how these identities are worked through social networks linked to family, neighbourhood or peer group narratives so that male territorialisms and matrilocalisms continue to 'rule OK' in marking the boundaries of real and imagined communities of labour.

In the course of these studies we have come across a significant difference among those children and young people whose informal learning is still largely confined to codes of apprenticeship and inheritance. There are those, predominantly but not exclusively, from the South Asian community who succeed in coming to grips with 'middle-class' codes of career and vocation in school, putting them to work in constructing themselves performatively as educational success stories, without, for all that, translating these codes into styles of identity work in other areas of their lives. And there are those, mainly but not exclusively, from white or black (African descent) working-class families who seem quite unable to take this step, but rather move in the opposite direction, attempting to translate their informal learning codes into ways of negotiating (and sometimes disrupting) the dominant educational success story authorized by the school.

None of the conventional criteria associated with factors of individual motivation, such as pushy parents, inspired teachers, sibling rivalry, or personal ambition adequately explain these differences. Existing models of sponsored and contest mobility do not seem to quite meet these cases either, since the relation between these patterns of code shift and academic performance, let alone occupational success, is at best tenuous and contingent on a whole range of situational and biographical variables that shape access to local opportunity structures (Bertaux and Thompson, 1993).

One possible factor of explanation emerged indirectly from reading the published autobiographies of East Enders, both immigrants and 'native', belonging to an older generation. Many of these writers had become successful in some sphere of public life despite, rather than because of, their experiences of schooling. In almost every case their accounts pivoted on an unexpected situation or event that temporarily upset the predictable course of their lives. Uprooting from homeland, the death of a parent, wartime evacuation, the closure of the docks, a move to a new area, the loss of a friend, a near-fatal car accident, serious illness, whatever the nature of the jolt, it had opened up access to perspectives and resources of symbolic empowerment that would not otherwise have been within their grasp.

These high-fliers did not simply pick up the pieces and carry on as before; they seized the opportunity to refashion the direction of their lives, and they did this by imagining their futures unfolding within a number of quite

distinct frames at once. In one context, such as the acquisition of domestic skills (such as gardening or DIY) or in the sphere of religious observance, they might see themselves as following in familiar footsteps, as so many chips off the old block. Through other cultural pursuits they might embark on a quest for a more vocal and 'authentic' self. In yet other domains, for example sex, sport or dance, progress might be described rather differently as a matter of gaining incremental mastery over a given body of techniques, while in their working lives they set out to climb step-by-step up a ladder of professional knowledge and status, to get to the top.

Elements from all these different life-story plots were woven together in a more or less seamless narrative web. Whatever the pattern – and it varied considerably from one account to the next – these differently coded versions of learning and life story were integrated within an overarching myth of origins and destiny that was both strongly aspirational *and* culturally plausible. In many cases these personal 'onwards and upwards' stories were linked to motifs of struggle based in the labour movement and/or the history of Diasporic communities (Thompson and Samuel, 1993).

In this way themes of individual advancement were subsumed or framed within a wider, more collective sense of progress, and many of the wrinkles in individual lives retrospectively ironed out. At the same time this kind of optimistic 'grand narrative' seemed to make it easier for the authors to shuttle back and forth between different codes and contexts and so gain entry into new and unfamiliar worlds of knowledge and experience with some measure of confidence. In default of this, the outcome might well have been very different; the original disruption could have proved all too traumatic leading to its compulsive repetition accompanied by a sense of identity confusion or chronic grievance, a fruitless search for ideal beginnings or impossibly 'happy endings' (Winnicott, 1990).

Among the present generation of young white East Enders there are still those with 'get up and go' who do just that, following customary self-made routes; and there are some who succeed in making the transition into new opportunity structures by giving up on the old ones based on closed networks of kinship and community. Meanwhile those who continue to apprentice themselves to a customary inheritance of labour power find themselves increasingly cut off from the newer brands of educational and cultural goods produced by and for the global city.

Those who fall back on the hidden economy, or whose lives are vulnerable to potentially traumatic disruption, whether through family breakdown, domestic violence, drug addiction, or depression, find themselves in a new kind of fix. The professional support systems designed to put their lives back together again no longer encode principles of hope that would enable them to develop alternative but still culturally plausible narratives of their own future.

The reason is not to do with more than the triumph of individualism; it bears on the fact that many of the larger success stories to which these

young people might have turned for inspiration are today politically discredited and educationally out of bounds. Myths of origin and destiny which feature onward marches of the people, the nation or the class are no longer publicly available as foundations for tales of individual progress against the odds, even if they continue to inform private dreams of rescue or revenge. At the same time discourses of social in/justice historically voiced by progressive community and trade union organizations have increasingly been commandeered by racist rhetorics, where they inform trajectories of white flight and, sometimes, fight.

For their Asian peers it is a very different story. Here the grand narratives still carry a strong moral and instructional value. The growth of ethnic identity politics has articulated diverse pursuits of cultural heritage, professional achievement, vocal selfhood and technical mastery into a single 'onwards and upwards' life story line; this makes it possible for some at least to overcome racial discrimination and turn initial experiences of social dislocation or academic failure into an educational success story. These forms of symbolic empowerment have in turn helped generate new styles of leadership from a generation which is as much at home in the global as in the local city. At the same time, in some of these communities inheritance narratives guarded by elders have become more dominant and all-embracing, setting up major tensions with other learning and life stories and alienating sizeable sections of the youth, while at the same time providing those who continue to be excluded from mainstream opportunity structures with compensatory pathways to self-respect.

Contemporary patterns of educational achievement and disadvantage have thus become both more complex and more unstable. Modernized codes of apprenticeship and career have been fused to promote new paradigms of open competitive virtue but come into increasing conflict with closed and often charismatic codings of inheritance and vocation. The grand narratives of political progress and scientific or religious enlightenment that hitherto made it possible for leading sections of the immigrant and working class communities to travel across different cultures of learning, transforming educational failure into success stories on the way, have either unravelled or work against each other to reinforce divisions and inequalities of every kind.

Learning regeneration – a cultural studies approach

This local case study raises a broader question about the narratives of aspiration that are available for the production or dissemination of knowledge and how they are institutionalized in particular regimes of learning and identity work. I am talking here about the stories we tell ourselves about how our lives should go, stories which are embedded in educational and family discourses and work at a quite deep and often unconscious level in

scripting the experiences and outcomes of schooling and further or higher education (Chamberlain and Thompson, 1998).

Over the last decade, ethnographic research in the field of cultural studies has amply demonstrated that the social designations of identity of every kind are becoming much more fluid, fractured and contested. Yet very little of this work has been applied to the task of drawing out what this might imply about how people actually learn, whether it's how to dance or knit, make love, ride bicycles or horses, play football or musical instruments, write graffiti or poetry, tell jokes or tall stories, practice safe sex, use computers, conduct experiments, or learn a foreign language.

These are all meaning-creating activities; they involve particular kinds of investment in personal meanings which in turn shape the sense of self (Salmon, 1998). What is learnt is not just a skill but an identity. If you can't manage the identity work entailed you won't manage to succeed in doing the activity. If you cannot see yourself as a budding chemist or rock musician then you're not going to get your head and your hands round a Bunsen burner or a guitar. But until you do take that first step to join what Jean Lave calls a 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1993), then you won't be able to concretely envisage what is entailed in assuming that identity.

This would seem to lock the argument into an old fashioned chicken-and-egg story, until we realize that we are *always* dealing with a process of double inscription, of a specific articulation, whose terms may change, between a real *and* an imagined community of practice. That articulation is not something given, it involves a process of *cultural labour* through which the means of self-representation are actively fashioned and transformed. How some people learn to culturally labour more productively than others, why some are more able than others to turn the products of cultural labour into realizable forms of cultural capital, how this relates to factors of class, or race, or gender, is thus at the heart of the process whereby educational distinctions are reproduced in and as social divisions (Bourdieu, 1981).

Today we are living in a world in which this process is dominated by the career code whose hegemony goes virtually unchallenged; careerism not only pervades almost every sphere of public and private life, but subsumes and reworks elements of the other codes *en route*. One of the reasons why there is a such a pervasive sense of personal fragmentation is that elements of the other codes continue to influence particular moments or contexts of self-representation yet have to compete for a hearing within the overall voicing of the life history by a career code that grants them only the most instrumental presence.

One of the problems with much recent pedagogic theorization has been the tendency to privilege one code at the expense of others as a source of 'learning universals' (Chaiklen and Lave, 1993). In recent discussions of vocationalism, for example, apprenticeship has been promoted as a normative definition of the work-based learning cycle; other codes are thereby

relegated to the pre-, post- or anti-modern margins. In contrast, the debate over lifelong learning has been between the technocratic advocates of cradle-to-grave careerism and the humanistic champions of creative self-fulfilment via experiential learning – a thinly coded variant of vocation. The fact that inheritance narratives continue to articulate most common-sense versions of the life-course is conveniently ignored in most of these debates.

The multi-code model would suggest that these normative theories of socio-cognitive development beg a whole series of important research questions. Not all learning and life-cycles have the teleological and centripetal 'drive' of apprenticeship or career; some are recursive and centripetal (inheritance), others asymptotic and centrifugal (vocation). There is no *a priori* reason why the latter should be treated as less definitive of 'modernity' than the former. Modernity takes many forms (Appadurai, 1998).

Instead, we need to know why one code rather than another has been institutionalized within a given educational or training sector or setting, why one furnishes the preferred images and idioms of a particular profession, and another the grammars of self-narrative used by certain other occupational groups. It is equally important to know how codes shape informal learning in contexts such as sexuality or leisure and how all this is related to race, gender, generational and class positioning.

Approaches based on a single code are not only theoretically inadequate; in so far as they inform educational policies they have practical consequences, often underwriting new patterns of exclusion, or reproducing old ones. The multi-code model suggests that it is only by encouraging the single-minded but simultaneous pursuit of technique, status, roots and self-expression in a journey *across* codes and contexts that more inclusive modes of educational lift-off are likely to be generated (Ranciere, 1991).

Despite this critique of modernism and the question for normative learning universals, my argument does not belong within the post-modern frame. It emphasizes the importance of providing stable homing devices that enable students to reflexively integrate a variety of identity topics and learning resources within an overarching dialogue between self, group and wider society. This is not a narrative about 'decentred' or disinherited subjects being sent on perpetual quests for sites of liminality where they can creatively transgress existing boundaries of knowledge in pursuit of new careers!

The model does not therefore locate the potential space of innovation, either for producing new knowledge or making fresh starts, in the properties of any one code; nor in their simple 'cross-fertilization' or transcendence. Instead, it would suggest looking more closely at *strategic learning conjunctures* where the process of trans-coding occurs and the rights of passage between learning contexts are negotiated *en route*.

Such conjunctures rarely conform to institutional timetables; they do not necessarily reflect official progression routes; the personal transition tactics they make possible neither follow a straight line nor go in one direction. The

learning patterns they generate proceed discontinuously and in a capillary fashion like rhizomes; their educational outcomes require other kinds of measurement and evaluation than those provided by the algorithms which quantify the official success and failure stories. We need to know more about how these conjunctures come about, how new learning and life-cycle paradigms are articulated through them, who takes advantage of these opportunities, and what kinds of possibility emerge within them for which groups.

From an epistemic point of view we are dealing with the creation of transitional objects-to-be-known that exist in the borderlands of meaning between the linguistically familiar and the culturally inarticulate (Lotman, 1990). Such transitional objects are produced through a set of code-specific transformations:

- apprenticeships that proceed by permanently deferring the 'moment' of mastery through continual regeneration of skills and competencies;
- open rather than closed inheritances where transmission no longer depends on claims of inherent entitlement based on cultural insiderhood, but on performative statements of identity;
- vocations in which the quest for a fully articulate self gives way to a more evocative dialogue with the other (other gender, class, ethnicity) as both internal condition and external limit to what can be known;
- careers that pursue more fluid and discontinuous lines of desire than those laid down by the structures that govern the professional rat race.

If these trans-codings do not amount to 'learning universals' then at least they point to a convergent frame of mind characteristic of reflexive or late modernity (Beck *et al*, 1994). We might characterize this as the 'art of negative capability' – the ability to entertain ambiguity, uncertainty, and doubt without reaching for premature closure in the name of fact, correctness, or essentialized identity (Milner, 1987). This refusal to reach foregone conclusions is closely linked to skills of improvisation and conjecture; in our view this constitutes an important, though largely ignored, factor in considering the conditions of symbolic empowerment critical for successful learning outcomes (Ginsberg, 1990). It points to a potential space of cultural and cognitive innovation that no educational system or society can afford not to nurture.

Beginners please: towards a theory and practice of 'propaedeutics'

Strategic learning conjunctures are thus marked by a break with customary practice, a departure from old habits, a new chapter in the life story, a fresh learning curve marked by a sense of excitement or discovery. But that does

not mean these conjunctures are the prerogative of noviciates. What old hands, of any age, may have learnt, and what they may have the ability to teach by example, is precisely how to begin afresh each time. They know this because they have thoroughly grasped the tricks – or if you like the generative grammars – of their particular trades, disciplines, or fields of knowledge (Bernstein, 1974).

In this view, the elementary structures of a given body of knowledge, whether cooking, physics, music or historiography, are constituted by the underlying grammar which makes it possible to create new dishes, discover new natural laws, write a musical composition or make fresh connections between historical facts.

Generative grammars are at the outset largely unconscious; they constitute the primary process of learning out of which secondary, more conscious elaborations arise in the course of instruction and practice (Bateson, 1978). What attracts people to a particular field or subject is, however, often a sense that they have a 'feel for it' at this deeper level – a feel that is then, if all goes well, progressively transformed into a 'knack' – the capacity to choose the most appropriate device in any given circumstance, for 'hitting the nail on the head'.

The propaedeutics – the elementary structures and underlying rules that constitute a discipline – emerge most clearly when they are broken. The mistakes made by beginners and the deliberate deviations from customary practice made by old hands are both integral to the learning process; but in the first case what is being learnt is the normative limits and conditions which govern the surface structure of a practice – the procedures that make it possible to do (or not do) it at all. In the second what is being explored is the deeper structure of unconscious representation that governs the desire to know and makes authoritative innovation – the production of transitional objects – possible.

In many contexts of learning the two levels are often confused. This is partly because in the process of graduation from initial learning to initialized learning (ie, learning which is owned because it has the authoritative stamp of the learner's own signature upon it) there is an intermediate step or stage in which attempts are often made to simulate or emulate the process of innovation by disrupting surface structures in a purely procedural way.

This confusion of levels can become systemic in the case of mentoring schemes where superficial idiosyncrasies of personal style or approach on the part of the mentor or 'role model' are often seized upon as the focus for 'mimetic' identity work while the real tricks of the trade remain ungrasped.

Peer-group pedagogies suffer from a similar disadvantage in so far as they collapse or conflate different instances of imitation/emulation/innovation into a single all-embracing learning gestalt. Finally, models of lifelong learning premised on the ideal of the 'self-starting, self-motivated, self-disciplined student' tend to run together themes from all four codes into a

single learning cycle, without considering the tensions and disjunctures that necessarily arise in the process of moving from one 'plot' or context to the next. As in the autobiographies of autodidacts there is never a moment in which lack of knowledge is allowed to function positively as a support for the desire to know (Ranciere, 1991).

Our model suggests an alternative approach in which the framework of 'learning transference' is not primarily provided by the interpersonal relation between teacher and student, or the peer-group dynamic, important though these are, but by the transitional (or trans-coded) objects which serve as their proxy. These 'object relations' are not reducible to specific topics of instruction or identity work – they emerge out of that special communication between 'knack' and 'feel' that goes with learning the underlying tricks of a trade.

By paying more attention to conflicts of affiliation which may arise in this primary process, we believe it may be possible to pre-empt some of the learning difficulties which predispose students to underachieve or drop out.

A final implication of this model is that it problematizes the patriarchal equation between age, status and experience. It highlights the fact that children may in some contexts be old hands who know better than their elders how to proceed. In other situations elders may be more able than younger people to tolerate the frustrations of beginning afresh.

The markers of im/maturity customarily attached to different kinds of cultural performance are undergoing rapid inter- and intra-generational change. This is an important and largely neglected area of education research (Martin, 1995).

The hidden Curriculum Vitae, or learning's other scenes

Although the concepts we have outlined (transitional object, potential space, negative capability, propaedeutics) have much in common with Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development', they add a psychodynamic dimension which is missing from contemporary accounts of learning based on his work (Vygotsky, 1978).

Our model emphasizes the importance of structures of feeling and fantasy which, although largely ignored in rationalistic theories of instruction, nevertheless can exert a decisive influence on learning outcomes. These psychic structures are neither divorced from nor reducible to social structures – they are culturally embedded and narrativized as code-specific myths of origin and destiny; as such they provide templates for distinctive trajectories of identity work set in motion by the primary learning process.

This hidden Curriculum Vitae constitutes the 'other scene' of the learning and life-cycle, connecting imagined communities of aspiration and remembrance with real communities of practice. It is the constantly shifting inter-

action of these two registers of 'community' (rather than the simple one-way transition from the imaginary to the real) that shapes the trajectory of educational biographies (Salmon, 1998).

The focus on libidinal investments (and disinvestments) in learning inevitably highlights issues of sexism and racism. The masculinization of apprenticeship, the racialization of inheritance, the grid of feminization thrown over occupational choices by the vocation code, the way these positions are challenged or reproduced in dominant paradigms of career, all thus become highlighted as topics of research and intervention.

There is a further, class-related, aspect to the 'other scene'. The model I have outlined has arisen out of work with groups of mainly unemployed young people who often deal with their lack of real control over learning, labour and life process by adopting magical positions of omniscience associated either with subcultural styles or the staking of counter-hegemonic claims to superior knowledge. It is clear that such groups find it especially difficult to hold onto the beginner's position because peripheral participation plays back so many experiences of exclusion and marginality suffered in the wider society. It is easier to carry over already learnt strategies of self-defence, to drop out or disrupt the learning process, rather than to accept that symbolic empowerment (and educational progress) comes from letting go these ploys. In a culture and society still so dominated by Eurocentric ideals of the 'mastermind', the temptation to play at rival 'civilization games' is correspondingly intense (Rattansi and Donald, 1991).

To counter these arcs of negative transference we need to develop a policy of educational regeneration that challenges structures of exclusion in a focused but still comprehensive way. We have to develop strategic learning conjunctures that are as mobile and context-sensitive as the process of trans-coding itself. In this chapter I have tried to lay the foundations for some further theoretico-practical research that might usefully be addressed to this issue, for example:

- How do patterns of idealization and foreclosure operate within mimetic forms of instruction associated with the apprenticeship code and how are these patterns masculinized as they are transmuted into idioms of masquerade via particular styles of academic performativity?
- Under what institutional and social conditions does the code of inheritance become racialized or de-racialized, and under what terms does it become re-articulated to other codes?
- How might the profession of envy and rivalry orchestrated through the career code be sublimated into more productive forms of emulation via mentoring and peer-group pedagogies?
- How are anxieties of influence both articulated and disavowed in practices of scientific or aesthetic innovation pursued within the framework of vocation, and how might these endeavours be given a less individualistic focus?

These questions are far from academic. They bear centrally on the reformation of contemporary educational discourse around some more substantial notion of stakeholding, and on the production of democratic subjects (Joyce, 1994). They also highlight what is at stake in their construction of popular masculinities beyond the cultures of manual and mental labourism (Connell, 1995). And they resonate with wider concerns about the state of the nation as we approach a new millennium.

In the series of narrative paintings that Hogarth called 'Marriage à la Mode', he tells the terrible story of how an arranged marriage goes off the rails, as the systematic perversion of shared hopes brings out the worst and most excessive forms of self-destructive individualism. The marriage of convenience between different codes represented by Modern Apprenticeship is unlikely, fortunately, to have such drastic consequences for those who embark on it! Yet it may have just as pernicious an effect on the enhancement of their best hopes unless we pay more attention to the discrepant versions of learning and life story that are in play here rather than supposing that they all somehow knit together into a seamless web of learning progression. In this chapter I have tried to indicate something of the contribution which cultural studies can make to thinking through this problem.

Note

The provenance of this chapter is as follows: the basic ideas were first developed in the mid-1980s when I was briefly Acting Director at the Post-16 Education Centre at the Institute of Education, University of London. They were first published by the Centre in a monograph, *Rethinking the Youth Question* in 1988. This text was then reproduced along with others on related themes in a book of collected essays on education, labour and cultural studies, published under the same title by Macmillan in 1997. The present text revises and develops these ideas further in response to recent work on the theory of cultural practice by Jean Lave (Lave and Wenger, 1993) and others. This 'rethinking' has also evolved in the context of a new action research programme on learning regeneration which I am currently directing at the New Docklands Campus of the University of East London. I am very grateful to Phil Salmon at the Institute of Education and to Pat Ainley for their continuing support of this intellectual project over the years, and to Mike Rustin and Alan O'Shea at the University of East London for providing such a welcoming and supportive environment which enabled the new work to be carried out.

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